

Displaced Children and Orphans Fund: Liberia

REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH FIGHTING FORCES IN LIBERIA

Implementing Partner: International Rescue Committee (IRC)

Funding Period: August 2003 – July 2006

Amount: \$1,672,070

Purpose: Mitigate the effect of violence and displacement on Liberian youth by engaging them and their communities in addressing protection concerns and ensuring emotional and social well-being.

Accomplishments:

- Provided material support to 19 schools with some 6,200 students, more than 40 percent of whom were female.
- Established and trained 12 Child Welfare Committees.
- Trained 170 teachers and 12 principals.
- Established 11 peer health education groups.
- Based on a market survey, established an innovative vocational apprenticeship training program serving 90 vulnerable children (66 percent females), most of them former child soldiers.

Liberia lies at the heart of regional conflict in West Africa. Before civil war engulfed the country in 1989, Liberia had been devastated by more than a century of graft and discrimination among its citizens. Fourteen years of intermittent civil war resulted in a quarter of a million deaths, one million internally displaced people (IDPs), and 500,000 refugees. When USAID began to work with IRC on its project to benefit the woman and children associated with the fighting forces, Liberia was in a state of humanitarian crisis, but the country has made dramatic strides towards recovery. The completion of the United Nations-sponsored disarmament of ex-combatants and the deployment of 15,000 peacekeepers has dramatically improved security throughout the country, allowing refugees and IDPs to begin returning home.

Prior to this, in 2004, USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund program focused primarily on vulnerable children in camps for the internally displaced near the capital. Working with the Ministry of Education, IRC helped create supportive schools and mechanisms to protect children's rights, while creating opportunities for psychosocial and educational development. As families return home, project focus has turned to developing community-based structures to protect vulnerable children in rural villages and towns.

The program's focus in 2005 is in Lofa County, where nearly 200,000 refugees, IDPs, and ex-combatants are expected to return. It is helping schools to re-start and to incorporate former child soldiers and other children carrying heavy emotional burdens. During the disarmament process, IRC was the lead agency for reunifying children associated with fighting forces in Nimba and Lofa counties with their families, and it is building on the relationships established with vulnerable children and households. It is mobilizing community Child Protection Committees to identify and address the most vulnerable children, and is actively involving peer educators as health change agents among youth.